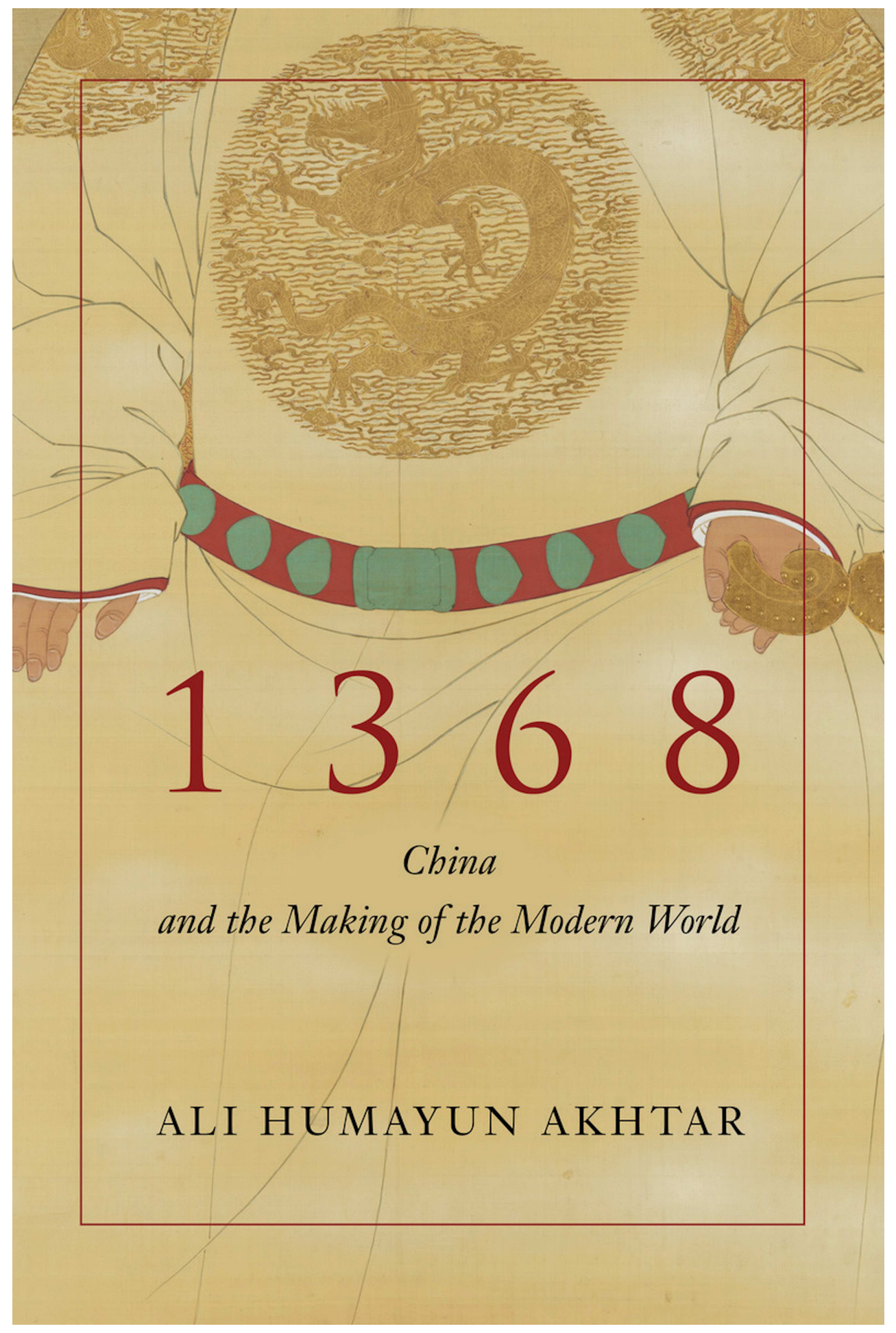




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China
and the Making of the Modern World

ALI HUMAYUN AKHTAR

"This book provides us with a valuable historical understanding of one of the big questions of our time: how and why has China become a 21st-century global superpower?"

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China and the Making of the Modern World
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China

and the Making of the Modern World

ALI HUMAYUN AKHTAR

HISTORY / ASIA

THE ESTABLISHMENT of the Great Ming dynasty in 1368 was a monumental event in world history. A century before Columbus, Beijing sent a series of diplomatic missions across the South China Sea and Indian Ocean that paved the way for China's first modern global era. 1368 maps China's ascendance from the embassies of Admiral Zheng He to the arrival of European mariners and the shock of the Opium Wars. In Ali Humayun Akhtar's new picture of world history, China's current rise evokes an earlier epoch, one that sheds light on where Beijing is heading today.

Spectacular accounts in Persian and Ottoman Turkish describe palaces of silk and jade in Beijing's Forbidden City; Malay legends recount stories of Chinese princesses arriving in Melaka with gifts of porcelain and gold. During Europe's Age of Exploration, Iberian mariners charted new passages to China, which the Dutch and British East India Companies transformed into lucrative tea routes.

But during the British Industrial Revolution, the rise of steam engines and factories allowed the export of the very commodities once imported from China. By the end of the Opium Wars and the arrival of Commodore Perry in Japan, Chinese and Japanese reformers called for their own industrial revolutions to propel them into the twentieth century.

What has the world learned from China since the Ming and how did China reemerge in the 1970s as a manufacturing superpower? Akhtar's book provides much-needed context for understanding China's rise today and the future of its connections with both the West and a resurgent Asia.

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*China and the Making
of the Modern World*

ALI HUMAYUN AKHTAR

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P R E F A C E

When did China lose its innovative edge to powers like the United Kingdom and the United States? What is China's future in the global manufacturing landscape that it now dominates? As China expands its economic place in the world, will the West pursue a new path to high-tech industrialization, or alternatively will it continue on the road of globalization and labor outsourcing adopted in the 1970s? Navigating these questions requires an understanding of how the twentieth-century world of globalization came into being. It requires understanding how western Europe first came to dominate an Asian economic landscape once oriented around China, Japan, and Southeast Asia. This book tells the story of China's first modern global age, placing special emphasis on encounters between Beijing and the West since the Age of Exploration. From the start of the Great Ming dynasty in 1368 to the end of the Qing in 1912, the making of modern China is also the story of the making of the modern world. In its origins, it is the story of how western European shipping came to bypass the once dominant Italian and Middle Eastern markets of the medieval world. By the end of the two Opium Wars (ca. 1839–1842, 1856–1860), western Europe's "Age of Discoveries" in search of the so-called Far East trade transformed a once global China into something very different. In the words of Napoleon, China had become a "sleeping lion" across the seas and oceans where Ming treasure ships once sailed.

In some ways, even before China's encounters with Europe's global shipping networks during the Age of Exploration, China was always a global power. Xian, home of the legendary Terracotta Army and one of the region's earliest mosques, was a key node along the ancient silk routes. But there was a global turn that took place with the arrival of European powers in

the South China Sea, a turn that had its roots decades earlier. In the early 1400s, in the first years of the Ming's establishment, Beijing made its own turn to the open seas. On the eve of Portugal and Spain's arrival in Melaka and Manila, Beijing cultivated an unprecedented degree of political and cultural proximity with the maritime states of the South China Sea and Indian Ocean. Between 1405 and 1433, a century before Magellan charted the first trans-Pacific shipping routes from Acapulco to Manila, the Ming commissioned a series of diplomatic missions that set sail for all of the geographies where Spain and Portugal looked for profits after 1492: Japan, Thailand, the Malay peninsula, the Indian subcontinent, Iran, East Africa, and the Arabian gateways of the Mediterranean. Intent on projecting Beijing's naval and manufacturing power around the world, the Ming's convoy of treasure ships traversed the Indian Ocean and South China Sea with cargoes of commodities that eventually dominated western European trade portfolios: porcelain, precious metals, embroidered textiles, tea, and other rare items produced in China and neighboring states.

Led by Muslim admiral Zheng He of Yunnan, China's own age of exploration—a maritime diplomatic overture—accelerated the movement not only of Chinese material culture around the world but also Chinese political and social networks. This transfer occurred especially throughout Southeast Asia, where western European powers a century later would begin building the commercial portfolios and design expertise that would eventually drive European industrialization. In the interim centuries, from the 1500s through the 1800s, the lore of Chinese and Southeast Asian port cities took on new and unprecedented dimensions. In the earlier part of this history, following the arrival of Iberian vessels in Manila and Macau, Jesuit linguists trained as go-betweens for diplomacy in China and Japan. By the end of the sixteenth century, Portuguese and Spanish business networks fully bypassed Italian and Middle Eastern middlemen for access to the region, but they were on the verge of being eclipsed themselves by two newcomers: the Dutch and the British. With the support of the rising Dutch Republic and British monarchy, the Dutch and British East India Companies followed their Iberian neighbors to the South China Sea in the 1600s. They negotiated settlement agreements in selected Asian centers and outright conquered others, all while maintaining a degree of distance from China's own military might. Change was afoot, however, with the onset of technological advances in western Europe that included the development of industrial machinery and the steam engine.

And by the 1800s, as British mass production and weapons manufacturing reached an unprecedented degree of sophistication, the tables had turned. China was on the verge of eclipse.

The rise of the British Industrial Revolution and the end of the Opium Wars in the mid-1800s saw a once powerful China pass into the world's geopolitical periphery. Beijing's political and territorial losses on the mainland, together with Commodore Perry's arrival in Edo in 1853, signaled a seismic shift in China's political and cultural currency that had a tremendous impact on the region. Under the leadership of samurai-turned-politicians, Japan took the lead in embarking on an unprecedented high-tech industrial transformation that turned away from Chinese political models and coopted British and American advances. China's own transformation, built on Tokyo's Anglo-Japanese model, was a slower affair. With roots in the final decades of the Qing era, and following a series of halting advances that carried through the tumultuous twentieth century, the industrial transformation of China finally occurred after the economic reforms of the late 1970s and the transfer of technological know-how from Japan and the West to China's new manufacturing centers: Tianjin, Qingdao, Ningbo, Shenzhen, and others. Since the 2000s, on the heels of China's acceptance into the World Trade Organization with the then president of the United States' enthusiastic support, debates about China as a post-Soviet "superpower" have been in full bloom.

From the perspective of the story told in this book, in sum, China's rapid emergence as a high-tech commercial player is the second iteration of its place as an international manufacturing power since the onset of global maritime navigation. The international renown associated with tech hubs like Shenzhen and Shanghai today evokes Europe's earlier fascination with Chinese commodities manufactured in porcelain-producing Jingdezhen and tea-exporting Quanzhou. What makes this new iteration significant is how it continues to be overlooked by many economists, politicians, and historians. In the same way many economic historians place China on the periphery of a more British-centered picture of world history since the Age of Exploration, politicians frequently underestimate the extent that China's industrialization since the 1970s points to its emergence as a new economic and military superpower in Asia. What the long-duration history told in this book illustrates is that with the European Union's rising economic crises, China in many ways already is a superpower, and the tensions between

international development institutions like the World Bank and the One Belt One Road initiative illustrate that emerging markets have yet to determine how exactly they navigate their own place in this shifting landscape. With the goal of understanding this changing geopolitical landscape and its long-duration origins, this book offers a new picture of China's global encounters since the Great Ming and the making of the modern world.

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CHAPTER 1

Five Hundred Years across the Indian Ocean and South China Sea

When did China, one of the leading manufacturing centers of the ancient world, lose its innovative edge to Europe, and to what extent did China's older legacy during the Great Ming (1368–1644) and Qing dynasties (1644–1912) pave the way for modern industrialization? As China reemerges as a manufacturing superpower, should Western countries maintain their trade policies in Asia's emerging markets in accordance with the economics of globalization, or alternatively should a now deindustrialized West embark on a new high-tech industrialization independent of a newly industrialized Asia? Answering these questions requires a long-duration understanding of global history, and more specifically, a picture of how an industrialized western Europe first came to dominate a once China-centered Asian economic world.

CHINA AND THE WEST: FIVE HUNDRED YEARS OF EXCHANGE

China's impact on the modern economy has its roots in the era of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), when European maritime navigation first bypassed the Middle East in pursuit of the legendary Spice Islands (Maluku Islands, Indonesia) and the storied commodities of China: silk, silver, scent, porcelain, and the like. It was during the Ming era when Spanish and Portuguese seafaring expeditions first charted direct routes to the doorsteps of China, specifically Manila and Macau in the South China Sea. What the Iberians

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found was a world that was deeply enmeshed with China in terms of politics, commerce, and culture. Just a century before Magellan's trans-Pacific expedition from Acapulco to Manila (1519–1521), the Ming led China's own variety of an "age of exploration." The dynasty commissioned a series of diplomatic expeditions to ports across Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, East Africa, and the Middle East. The admiral that led the expeditions, Zheng He of Yunnan, was a Muslim of part Bukharan ancestry. The crewmate who documented the expeditions, Ma Huan, was also Muslim. Their backgrounds reflected the global dimensions of Ming-era Chinese political culture, which was in continuity with China's earlier Yuan (Mongol), Song, and Tang eras. Across all of these earlier centuries, inland cities like Xian and coastal cities like Quanzhou were centers of exchange that saw merchants from the Middle East and Central Asia come and go and, in many cases, settle permanently in Chinese cities.¹ Stories about Quanzhou circulated so widely in the Middle East in the medieval centuries that the city came to be known by an Arabic nickname: Zaytun (Italian: Zaiton). Against the backdrop of these earlier connections between China and its Middle Eastern trade partners, what Zheng He's expeditions represented was a new projection across the South China Sea and Indian Ocean of Beijing's global political and material culture. It was an image that the Ming sought to cultivate both locally and abroad—that is, across China's overland and maritime frontiers in the worlds of the Southeast Asia's sultanates, Northeast Asia's shogunates, Central Asia's khanates, and an increasingly Ottoman-dominated Middle East.

What made the timing of Zheng He's expeditions impactful was the collapse in the previous century of Asia's most influential empires and the rise of a litany of new states in the 1400s. In the lead-up to the European Age of Exploration, the most strategically located maritime states were the various sultanates close to the Spice Islands: the Sultanates of Melaka on the Malay peninsula, Brunei on the coast of Borneo close to Manila, Pasai on the northern tip of Sumatra, Bantam on the island of Java, and the like. In a development that helped recenter China within the Asia-Pacific region, Zheng He's diplomatic expeditions subsumed the Sultanate of Melaka into a patron-client relationship that provided a variety of mutual benefits. For Melaka's part, the sultanate's connection with the Ming protected Melaka from invasion by Thailand's powerful Ayutthaya Kingdom (1350–1767) further north. Melaka, in turn, represented the Ming's gateway to Indian Ocean commodities and the Spice Islands.

In the 1500s, it was these sultanates that the Portuguese and Spaniards encountered upon their arrival in the South China Sea from either direction. What made them Europe's first gateway to China were the relationships the sultanates had already developed with the Ming in Beijing back in the 1400s. This connection was apparent during the Spanish conquest of the Philippines. When the governor of the Spanish Americas Miguel López de Legazpi arrived in the Philippines in the 1560s, he described a region with commodities and merchants that pointed to a local connection with both the sultan of Brunei and the emperors of China and Japan. De Legazpi and his crew found in Manila a group of Japanese merchants living in one of a variety of Japantowns that were scattered across Southeast Asia's ports. Private Japanese commerce in the fifteenth-century South China Sea, like the commerce of private Chinese merchants in local "junk" ships, represented one of the forerunners of what the Portuguese and later Dutch mastered in the seventeenth century: inter-Asian commerce, or more specifically, the purchase and sale of Asian commodities—especially Chinese commodities—across Asian ports.

It was in this Sinocentric world that the Iberian powers built their first global commodities portfolios in the 1500s. The endeavor was made possible, in part, through the skills of Iberian-sponsored polyglot Jesuits who played the role of diplomatic go-betweens in both Beijing and Nagasaki. China's markets were open for the first time to western European merchants, which meant that Middle Eastern and Italian merchants would no longer be the exclusive middlemen for Iberian access to the so-called Indies (Spanish: *Indias*)—that is, the lands beyond the Indian subcontinent in East and Southeast Asia. For the Iberians in the 1500s, the first profits came about not only through participation in the inter-Asian trade patterns, but also through the transport of Chinese and Japanese commodities back to Europe via Portuguese-held Goa and Spanish-held Manila and Acapulco. Iberian merchants, like their later Dutch and British competitors, purchased finished textiles from the Persian and Deccan coasts and brought them northward to Japanese ports, and on their return trips brought Japanese silver bullion southward to China and Southeast Asia for additional profits. Official and private Chinese trade provided access to high-priced Chinese manufactured items—tea, porcelain, silks, scent, and the like—that would, in turn, be sold for the highest profits in Europe.

One of the most remarkable phenomena that could be observed in this history was the extent that the Iberians, like their Dutch and British successors,

exercised utmost caution in their diplomatic relationships with Beijing in a manner that contrasted with their more aggressive military conquests throughout Southeast Asia. In the same way the Portuguese diplomatically secured their settlement in Macau while outright conquering Beijing's ally in Melaka, the Dutch likewise proceeded more carefully in their settlement in Taiwan (Fort Zeelandia) out of Beijing's sight just years after conquering the Sultanate of Banten. The Dutch similarly cultivated diplomatic relations with the rising Tokugawa shogunate with the utmost care, securing a trade agreement that lasted into the end of the shogunate in the late 1800s. What these patterns of diplomacy signaled was that even after a transfer of power in China from the Ming to the Qing dynasty (1644–1912), which coincided with the Japanese Tokugawa period (1603–1867), European powers understood Beijing to be as fearsome and formidable a player as ever.² By the 1800s, however, change was afoot, and it would come rapidly with the eruption of the Opium Wars.

The Opium Wars

The Opium Wars were originally an escalation of trade disagreements between China and the British, and the outcomes were staggering in terms of Beijing's territorial losses and diminished authority over ports previously under its purview. More specifically, the British East India Company in the early 1800s grew resistant to growing Chinese restrictions on the export of Chinese tea and import of British-manufactured opium. When the Chinese government destroyed a cargo of the narcotic, the British government stepped in, and the two governments began their first full-scale war. While the British operated sophisticated warships, China—legendary home of gunpowder technology—was still using shotguns, crossbows, and wooden boats in the 1800s that dated back to early Ming-era military strategies.³ Back in the Ming era, Chinese military technology was cutting edge and was marveled at by visitors from the Ottoman Empire. By the end of the Qing, it lagged far enough behind European technology to help earn China the moniker “sleeping lion” in the writings of Napoleon. It was, perhaps, fitting that only a few decades after Napoleon's career, it was a legion of French military experts who participated in the modernization of Japan's army in the era of intra-European competition for influence in late nineteenth-century Japan and China.

In this long-duration history of modern China dating back to the Ming, the Opium Wars represented an unprecedented escalation of military conflict

between China and a European power. China in the 1800s was not the formidable military force it once was in the 1500s and 1600s, which meant that the Chinese coast was more exposed than ever to new military players. The increasingly industrialized powers of western Europe stepped into that void, putting them in a position to be able to force new diplomatic and commercial arrangements on Beijing in what came to be known as “gunboat diplomacy.” With the British Empire taking the lead, new trade agreements in the late 1800s allowed a variety of European-made commodities to be forced onto Chinese and Japanese markets in a way that had never been seen before. In a move that would have lasting consequences, individual Chinese and Japanese reformers took advantage of the multiplicity of European powers in competition with one another. Individual Qing- and Tokugawa-era reformers of the late 1800s secured European political and technological know-how in return for a kind of patron-client relationship that was, from the start, never intended to be permanent in the eyes of these Chinese and Japanese reformers. The end of the century saw the start of reforms in China’s military and urban infrastructure, but a full-scale political and socioeconomic transformation would occur much sooner in Japan.

Japanese administrators in the late 1800s observed developments in China with particular alarm. In the Opium Wars’ aftermath, as Beijing lost control of Chinese ports, the last samurai and shoguns of Japan accelerated a process already in motion: the industrialization of the shogunate on the eve of its transformation into one of the twentieth century’s most powerful military empires. In Japan’s favor was its centuries-old diplomatic and commercial ties with the Dutch. Since the 1600s, Japanese administrators had continuous access to developments in Dutch medicine, technology, and general learning in an arrangement that facilitated Japan’s very rapid political and economic reforms of the late 1800s. The administrators who led a modern industrial Japan at the start of the 1900s started their lives as samurai who fought on foot for the *daimyo* of each of Japan’s domains-turned-prefectures. The dramatic shift in clothing from the cloak of a samurai to the suit of a parliamentarian signaled, alongside a political and economic transformation, a broader cultural turn away from China.

Japan’s turn away from its China-centered political and commercial past was especially remarkable from this very cultural perspective. The Meiji era (1868–1912) saw Japan embark on an all-encompassing path to political and socioeconomic reform that coopted British models of modernization and simultaneously rearticulated them in the form of a revised classical Chinese

written vocabulary about tradition, order, and progress. It was a model of modernization that would become China's own, one that Sun Yat-Sen would study with his own eyes over the course of his education and travels from British-held Hong Kong to Meiji-era Japan at the start of the 1900s.

For China, however, the replication of that model would take more than a century, and it would only truly accelerate in the 1970s in an arrangement that saw Western powers replicate a model implemented previously in Japan: the transfer of political and technological know-how eastward in a bilateral attempt to build a new Asia in the West's image—that is, in a West-centered global economic and security framework. From the perspective of this approach's critics, where this arrangement has potentially fallen short is in one of its widely anticipated outcomes: like the Japanese Empire of the early twentieth century, China in the early twenty-first century has emerged as one of the world's most formidable military and commercial players, which means policies oriented around economic partnerships have come under renewed scrutiny. The outcome is that the rise of a new global China evocative of an earlier one has pushed Western observers to call for a new “China policy.”

DEBATES ABOUT A WESTERN “CHINA POLICY”: BETWEEN CONFRONTATION AND COMMERCIAL DIPLOMACY

How the world navigates today's new and emerging Chinese superpower is in some ways unpredictable, but if history offers lessons for the future, then the story of China's first modern global era provides insights. In China's own case, the name of Beijing's state-led international development project—the One Belt One Road initiative—illustrates how Chinese political administrators are interested in repurposing history in the formation of policy.⁴ The name “One Belt One Road” evokes the ancient world's storied overland and maritime “silk road,” and its use in Chinese diplomacy illustrates how Beijing's growing infrastructure partnerships around Asia's emerging markets draw on a form of Chinese soft power built on a specific China-centered understanding of world history. In other words, Beijing's national administration looks self-consciously to its earlier global history for inspiration and models of soft power as it expands its geopolitical importance throughout parts of Asia, especially Southeast Asia's ASEAN markets (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), where Beijing has again encountered the West.

In the case of the West's most powerful player, the United States, what history tells us about the future of a "China policy" is more elusive, but not entirely so. While Washington's connection with the history in this book is much shorter, the spectrum of positions in the United States' current policies on both China and the ASEAN region evokes the full spectrum of its European predecessors in a way that illustrates the obvious: countries that see themselves as Western, including NATO's leading members in the European Union, have experimented for 500 years with dozens of approaches to engaging China's historical role as a global center of manufacturing, innovation, and productivity. What makes these earlier engagements with China educational for modern observers is how different aspects of the United States' current policies in Asia evoke all of its predecessors, making world history the proverbial window into the future.

On one side of the West's diplomatic antecedents is the early modern Portuguese Empire, which evokes the modern blend of American commercial and military engagement in the South China Sea. Throughout the 1500s and 1600s, the Portuguese were simultaneously cautious around China and aggressive with China's allies. More specifically, in contrast with Portugal's careful negotiations with Beijing and Tokyo was its much more militarily hostile policy further south in the Malay peninsula. Portugal outright conquered the Ming's Melakan ally (1511) in a campaign that Thailand's Ayutthaya Kingdom never attempted for fear of Ming reprisal. The Portuguese, in other words, used a mix of diplomacy and military engagement around the South China Sea to simultaneously maximize their profits in China and minimize the risks to their own Portuguese-held territories across the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. What exposed the limits of Portugal's political and commercial abilities, however, was its growing tensions with Japan in the early 1600s. In Tokyo, the rising Tokugawa shogunate commanded enough political and military force to expel the Portuguese in 1639. The shoguns saw the Portuguese as a blend of merchants, pirates, and a potential military nuisance who could compromise the Tokugawa dynasty's own aspirations of bringing all Japanese domains under the dynasty's rule in Tokyo. The expulsion came some three centuries before American officer Commodore Perry arrived in Tokyo harbor in 1853 to force a new trade deal on the same Tokugawa dynasty. For Portugal, the silver lining of its multifaceted engagement in the region was its continued settlement rights on the Chinese coast, where Portuguese-Chinese bilateral diplomacy allowed the city of Macau to

remain a central transit point for Portuguese trade in Asian commodities well into the 1900s.

On the other side of these diplomatic models was Spain's approach in Asia, which evokes modern protectionist policies oriented around producing commodities for local consumption and export rather than relying on imports. More specifically, in the 1500s and 1600s, Spanish administrators charted and mastered the trans-Pacific Acapulco-Manila sea route in a way that facilitated access to Chinese markets without being dependent on it. More specifically, the Spanish conquest of the Philippines secured a back door to Asian markets while still allowing the Spanish Habsburg Empire to build a semi-protectionist economic system oriented around productivity within its own imperial boundaries. The most productive Spanish-held centers were cities like Mexico City and Oaxaca (Mexico) as well as Lima (Peru). On the one hand, the Manila-Acapulco galleons brought Chinese silk and porcelain to centers like Mexico City throughout the 1600s and 1700s, where they became intertwined with the empire's earlier trans-Atlantic ceramic and silk industries linking Mexico with Seville and Granada. On the other hand, wholesalers and silk craftsmen in Spain pressured the government to restrict the import of Chinese commodities to the Americas, where there were already legal limits at the start of the 1600s on the amount of Asian merchandise that could be imported into the Americas via Manila. Spanish legal restrictions on the import of Chinese and Japanese goods into the Americas were in harmony with Madrid's successful construction and expansion of industries like the silk industry in Mexico that could produce and export commodities just as valuable as their Asian counterparts.⁵ That is, Spain sought to control the price of their own empire's commodities by preventing the mass import of Chinese and Japanese goods and maximizing the export of their own portfolio of Chinese-like goods: Iberian- and Mexican-made silk commodities, Mexican-made cochineal dyes for silk-based textiles like Venetian velvet, Mexican- and Peruvian-mined gold and silver, Mexican-made chocolate for consumption as a beverage in Europe, and various other profitable empire-made exports that eventually competed in Europe with Portugal's Chinese and Japanese imports.

In many ways, Spain anticipated the later machine-facilitated productivity of the industrial-era British and Dutch, but it had the advantage of a vast and sprawling territory of natural resources as well as a local—specifically, indigenous—labor force. Its approach evokes Western anti-globalization

arguments since the 1970s that are in favor of protecting Western manufacturing and productivity and limiting trade deals with China. Spain was willing to engage the world of China by building a back door to its markets in the Philippines, but it relied primarily on productivity within its imperial borders in a way that limited the risks that the Portuguese, conversely, embraced in the latter's sprawling activities from Melaka to Macau and Nagasaki. That Spain was at the head of a massive American empire, one replete with natural resources and an indigenous population that maintained their own pre-Spanish Mesoamerican industries, made exposure to these Chinese commercial and security risks even less urgent.

For the Dutch and British in the 1700s, both powers found benefits in a mix of Portugal's and Spain's approaches on the eve of their own machine-driven factory industrialization. Dutch administrators like entrepreneur Jan Pieterszoon Coen mapped out a plan for commercial and military engagement in the South China Sea that was built explicitly on lessons from the Portuguese and Spaniards. For the Dutch, Portugal's model demonstrated the commercial possibilities of securing direct access to Chinese commodities. Spain's model illustrated that it was equally lucrative to find ways of manufacturing commodities within one's own territories, whether in the Southeast Asian sultanates that the Dutch could outright conquer or in Dutch cities. On the Indonesian island of Java, the Dutch managed to manufacture Arabic coffee in the 1700s using local labor. The move foreshadowed the British transfer of Chinese tea manufacturing secrets to the plantations of British India a century later in the 1800s. Back in the Netherlands, the city of Delft became the center for the manufacture of porcelain-like blue-and-white Delftware ceramics. Delftware was close enough to Chinese porcelain to render the Chinese import superfluous. The rise of Delftware anticipated the development of Staffordshireware in England in the 1800s, when developments in machinery and mass production would facilitate the mass export of western European commodities onto the very Chinese markets that once manufactured items for Western consumption.

The Dutch and British, in other words, synthesized both the Portuguese and Spanish approaches of building a massive import portfolio and constructing industries within the empire's boundaries that diminished the need for these imports. What distinguished the Dutch and British from their predecessors most clearly was something that also evokes the West's current engagement with China: government administrators relied on the

privatized efforts of government-supported companies that were awarded a monopoly, or that were at least subsidized, in the purchase and sale of select goods in certain geographies around the world. These were the Dutch and British East India Companies. Like the powers that governed them back home, both companies were interested in foreign productivity and innovation, and they knew from their Portuguese predecessors that their most profitable commodities would include those of the South China Sea and Indian Ocean—namely, Chinese tea, Chinese and Japanese porcelain, precious metals, and both South and Southeast Asian finished textiles. In the end, through a mix of conquest and trade agreements, both the British and the Dutch managed to carve out a large slice of the Asian economic world by the end of the 1700s. The outcome was not only a turn of Dutch and British material and popular culture towards all things “Oriental” and exotic, but also the start of a profound advancements in innovation and design in Europe itself—especially the use of steam engines for low-cost mass production of Chinese-like commodities—that, in turn, drove the Industrial Revolution.⁶ And from these new British and Dutch industrial centers, through the ingenuity of steam technology and factory-centered mass production techniques, porcelain-like ceramics and silk-like textiles could be exported for profit all around the world. For the British, what accelerated these manufacturing advancements was the simultaneous development of an unprecedented level of military might, one that facilitated the possibility of building what became by the late 1800s the world’s most powerful global empire—that is, the British Empire. With that might came the authority to accomplish what no European power could previously: forcing China to open its markets to mass-produced European commodities, making China an overnight mass importer of British machine-made commodities.

What makes these older varieties of a “China policy” so evocative of the United States’ current policies is how they are driven by the same fundamental question asked by today’s policymakers: How will Western powers simultaneously benefit economically from a productive China while also minimizing their dependence on China and any related security risks? Where there are limits to turning history into a window for the future is in one of the many new dimensions of this question today. While the West studied Chinese innovation throughout the Age of Discovery and the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution saw the tables turn: since the Opium Wars, China has emulated the West’s high-tech advancements in a process that accelerated

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“in the 1970s”

the 1970s and that drew in part on neighboring Japan’s nineteenth-century industrial reforms. Since the late 1800s, British interest in helping industrialize both China and Japan has evolved against the backdrop of competition over economic influence in Asia, particularly with the rise of new global players. By the mid-1900s, the most important of these new global players was the Soviet Union, whose rivalry with the United States and United Kingdom motivated a new Western partnership with China that evoked the same patron-client partnerships that Western countries cultivated with Japan in the late 1800s. In Japan’s case, Japanese industrialization facilitated the rise of the Japanese Empire that found itself on the losing side of World War II and that was rebuilt in the 1950s and 1960s but—in accordance with postwar treaties—without its military industry.

The West’s agreements with China since the 1970s were similarly oriented around industrializing Chinese cities, but they never came with limitations on the development of a modern high-tech Chinese military industry. The emphasis, rather, was on economic partnerships focused on building China’s own high-tech manufacturing know-how so that a postindustrial West could benefit economically from Chinese manufacturing and labor. The move came with the enthusiastic support of Western policymakers, corporations, and shareholders, with economists and policymakers celebrating the merits of freer trade, offshore outsourcing, and Cold War-era security. Critics, in contrast, warned of the long-term outcome of trade agreements that were unbalanced in the way they remained protectionist of local industries on the Chinese side while parallel industries in the United States and United Kingdom collapsed. Other critics pointed to long-term security concerns. In the end, some fifty years after the first Sino-American diplomatic meetings of the Nixon and Ford eras, China has managed to recenter itself both economically and militarily in an Asian economic world where broader advancements in a variety of new industries—like renewable energy—have become potential models for a new American and British post-factory high-tech reindustrialization.

Against this backdrop, current American, European Union, and Brexit-era British debates about trade with China and the wider Asia-Pacific world echo the debates of Western predecessors: Should American policymakers emulate the Portuguese of the 1600s and, through careful diplomacy, profit from economic partnerships with a productive China as it has since the 1970s? Or rather should the United States begin emulating the British of the 1800s

by building—or in today’s context, building anew—infrastructure for the production of goods and services that can correct its current trade deficit with a manufacturing superpower? Is there a model in the Spanish example of relying on natural resources and industries that are already available within one’s own political borders? Is there something to learn from the Dutch diversification of commodities, from its sale of imported Chinese-manufactured tea to Delft-manufactured pseudo-porcelain?

The United States’ current “China policy,” in sum, evokes all of its predecessors’ models of engagement, but there is one arena where it departs: a continuing modern trend in overlooking the recent and long-duration history of innovation throughout Asia that has only recently begun to capture popular imagination. Whether fearsome lion or a paper tiger, China is a historical center of innovation in the realm of design and manufacturing, and as in the case of all innovation, a history of culture lies underneath. That history includes centuries of political culture across dynasties and state administrations, intellectual culture oriented around books on aesthetics, popular culture built on language and social customs, and material culture oriented around design in everyday life. The Iberian-sponsored Jesuits were masters in understanding this history of innovation and culture, as were the many Dutch and British innovators who traveled to China and discovered the objects and manufacturing techniques that they found useful for their own industrial futures. It is this understanding of Chinese innovation and culture that remains missing in the writings of Western observers today, and it forms the heart of this book’s analysis of China since the Great Ming and the making of the modern world.

WRITING GLOBAL HISTORY FROM AN ASIA-CENTERED PERSPECTIVE

From the tales of Zheng He’s storied cargoes filled with silks and camphor to the life of the Italian-born Jesuit Matteo Ricci in Beijing, many of the figures in this book have been seen before in historical narratives about global navigation since Columbus. Some appear in chronicles written by their contemporaries, while others appear in studies written by historians interested in the lessons history offers today’s observer. Among the most influential of these historians is Peter Borschberg. Borschberg’s analysis has demonstrated how the modern economy came into existence in large part following centuries of global exchange in Southeast Asia. His research demonstrates how

trade partnerships like ASEAN are as much a shift in the global economy as they are a revival of past trade networks.⁷ Andre Gunder Frank's analysis of global economic history likewise illustrates how the modern world economy in many ways has its origins in Asia.⁸ Janet Abu-Lughod's work offers a similar contribution with an emphasis on connections between the Middle East and its eastern frontiers. In agreement with Chinese works on global history that see the Middle East as both Europe's neighbor and Asia's western periphery, Abu-Lughod has shown how the Dutch and British were historical newcomers to an ancient set of socioeconomic systems centered in Asia.⁹

This book builds on the analysis seen in past works on global history with a new emphasis on how history illuminates the current and future geopolitical landscape. What follows in this book's remaining chapters is the story of how China went from the storied exporter of the world's rarest commodities in the Ming era (1368–1644) to the largest importer of machine-made British exports by the end of the Qing era (1644–1912) to, today, a resurgent manufacturing superpower in the aftermath of its industrial transformation (ca. 1970s–present). This book tells the story of how western European mariners went from pirates to trade partners in the eyes of Asian administrators, and how these administrators found themselves coopting European models of modernization by the early 1900s in an attempt to extricate themselves from a geopolitical landscape that the West came to dominate. As this landscape continues to be reshaped in light of the European Union's slowed growth and the continued emergence of Asia's tiger economies since the 1970s, it is more important than ever to tell the story of global exchange since the Great Ming and the making of the modern world.

CHAPTER 2

Global Beijing under the Great Ming

How did China under the Great Ming (1368–1644) become a global power? The story of Beijing’s global turn during the Ming era is connected with developments in both Europe and in China itself. More than a century before the Age of Exploration, Beijing’s Ming dynasty was in the process of consolidating its place at the center of Asia’s overland and maritime trade routes—that is, the legendary silk and spice routes of the ancient world. The Ming commissioned a series of diplomatic expeditions across all three of its frontiers: the khanates of Central Asia across the Great Wall, the sultanates of Southeast Asia across the South China Sea, and the shogunates of Northeast Asia across the Sea of Japan. The outcome was the remarkably transoceanic cultural orientation of Ming politics and trade in the 1500s, when Spanish and Portuguese mariners began arriving in centers like Melaka, Macau, Manila, and Nagasaki. These cities became Europe’s back doors to the Chinese commercial worlds, and by the 1600s, a rising Russian empire cultivated its own overland route to China via the khanates of Central Asia. A closer look at the Ming’s connections with its three frontiers in the 1400s—Central Asia, Southeast Asia, and Northeast Asia—illustrates precisely how China went global just prior to the arrival of European mariners in the 1500s, and how the Age of Exploration’s construction of new transoceanic trade routes from Europe to Manila and Macau in effect extended the geographical

reach of Chinese politics and material culture to its final historical frontiers: western Europe and the Americas.

ORIGINS OF THE MING'S TRADE WITH CENTRAL ASIA AND THE MIDDLE EAST

When the dynasty of the Great Ming rose to power in China in 1368, it competed with several dynastic states that were well established in the region and that shaped the Ming's interest in global exchange. The most powerful were the Yuan, whom the Ming replaced in Beijing. The Yuan dynasty was one of four Mongol dynasties descended from the grandsons of Genghis Khan (d. 1227). One of the main legacies the dynasty left was a renewal of overland exchange across Central Asia. This renewal, and more specifically the ability of Italian powers to gain direct access to Central Asia via the Black Sea, earned the Mongol era the term *Pax Mongolica* (Mongol Peace) among European writers. The term echoed the so-called *Pax Romana* of the ancient Roman Empire, which consolidated enough of the Mediterranean coastline under a single centralized administration to build a semi-centralized trade system. There were parallels in how European merchants saw trade across the emirates and sultanates of the Abbasid Empire in the 700s C.E., which stretched from Iberia and North Africa to Egypt, Iraq, and the Indian subcontinent.

From the vantage point of Beijing, the key outcome of the Mongol Yuan era of the 1200s was the rise of new, or rather renewed, overland connections with Central Asia and the Middle East. Under earlier dynasties, especially the Song (960–1279), the movement of trade networks and commercial objects in and out of China often took place along the coast. In the 900s, for example, Quanzhou and Guangzhou represented the cultural crossroads where Middle Eastern Muslim merchants took up long-term residence for activities in diplomacy and commerce. Under the Yuan in the 1200s, inland regions like Yunnan just north of Thailand—the Ming's western frontier—became the new heartlands of Muslim commercial activities in China. Unlike the Arabic-speaking Middle Eastern Muslims of Song-era Quanzhou, these newer Muslim arrivals in the Yuan era were Persian speakers from Central Asia. This cultural shift in China's Muslim demographic helps explain why later Ming-era travelers from Central Asia came to encounter polyglot Persian-speaking Muslims who worked in Ming service in Beijing, and how Yunnanese admiral Zheng He emerged as a prominent Ming political figure

descended from one of the Yuan era's most famous Persian-speaking Central Asian Muslim families—namely, the family of the Bukharan governor of Yunnan, Nasr al-Din. Nasr al-Din was in charge of imperial finances in the 1250s, and the person who named him governor of Yunnan was the Mongol Yuan emperor himself: Khubilai Khan, the grandson of Genghis Khan. This shift also explains why the most prominent figures in the earlier Song-era administration, especially Pu (Arabic: Abu) Shougeng, came not from inland Yunnan but the coast. A closer look at these Muslim political and commercial networks illustrates how the Yunnanese Muslim administrators who worked in Ming service, including Zheng He, were not a new and unusual phenomenon in the 1400s but rather the most recent manifestation of an older Chinese connection with Central Asia and the Middle East that dated back to the Tang and Song eras. The outcome of this history is that with the arrival of the Ming, two developments occurred that facilitated Beijing's connections with its Central Asian and Southeast Asian frontiers in the 1400s: One segment of these Muslim networks was absorbed in Ming society and, in the case of Yunnanese Muslims, played a key role in the Ming administration in its diplomacy with Central Asian states. Another segment of these Chinese Muslim networks headed to Southeast Asia for permanent settlement among the rising sultanates. Some individual Muslims like Yunnanese admiral Zheng He connected both worlds in a career that was fitting for a global Ming-era diplomat.

Muslim Social Networks in China in the Lead-Up to the Ming Era

Tang-era Muslims settled at the eastern ends of the Central Asian silk routes in cities like Gansu and Shaanxi as early as the eighth century. Among coastal Chinese cities, Muslims settled especially in centers like Fujian and Guangdong.¹ In the Tang period, Muslim merchants were able to secure residency and movement rights through extraterritorial agreements, and they also built mosques in coastal cities like Guangzhou, Quanzhou, Hangzhou, and Chang'an. By the Song period (960–1279), certain developments in diplomacy occurred that made the rise of Persian- and Arabic-speaking Muslims in post-Song Yuan service a commonplace phenomenon. Partly in continuity with the earlier Tang dynasty's (618–907) coastal trade routes, the Song in southern China cultivated international maritime commerce and saw the settlement of various foreign communities along its interior and coastal regions. Song-era Quanzhou specifically saw both the long-term settlement

and short-term residency of a variety of Muslim merchants and Muslim community leaders. Song-era gravestones, replete with Muslim names, provide a surviving record of this phenomenon.² These gravestones, like the surviving annals of the Ming, point to a process of Sinicization among long-term Muslim resident families who worked in the Song administration. The most famous case is that of Pu Shougeng.

Pu Shougeng was the superintendent of maritime trade at Quanzhou when the Yuan arrived. His family name, Pu, was the Sinicized form of the Arabic *Abu*, meaning “father of.” Pu Shougeng was one of the many Song officials who remained in their positions upon the arrival of the Mongols and the establishment of the Mongol Yuan dynasty in Beijing. The Mongol administration in the 1200s absorbed much of Song governance in the aftermath of the conquest, paving the way for a Ming administration in the late 1300s that would synthesize its predecessors’ overland and maritime political outlooks.³ Pu Shougeng was an example of the many residents in late Song-era coastal China who came from Muslim families in imperial service and who remained in imperial service under the Yuan. Under both the Song and the Yuan, this demographic around the South China Sea facilitated maritime trade relations across the Indian Ocean with Arabic-speaking lands, and they commonly held the position of superintendent of trading at the ports. Fujian employed a total of thirty superintendents of trading ships during the Yuan period, and some one-third were Muslims. Under the Yuan, Pu Shougeng, was the supervisor of maritime trade for Guangdong and Fujian, eventually being named vice minister of Fujian.

Pu Shougeng’s profile and career as Fujian’s Muslim vice minister in the 1200s illustrates the extent that China was at a political and cultural crossroads on the eve of the Ming era, and that the new Ming administration was poised in 1368 to build connections with the Muslim khans and sultans who rose to prominence in Central and Southeast Asia on the eve of Europe’s arrival in the region.

What facilitated the Ming’s overland connections with these Central Asian khans was the deliberate attempt by Yuan-era administrators back in the 1200s to resettle Central Asian Muslim administrators and merchants in China’s interior, especially Yunnan. While the Yuan brought Muslim craftsmen and architects to the region as part of an empire-building technique, other Muslim arrivals such as merchants, tax collectors, and administrators came looking for new opportunities.⁴ Some even settled in Goryeo Korea

along the Yuan's northeast borders, only disappearing into a larger Confucian Korean future in the era of the Joseon dynasty (1392–1897) and its culturally homogenizing policies. The rise of Yuan-era Muslim administrators like Yunnanese-born governor Nasr al-Din offers a particularly interesting example of Central Asian Muslims becoming, in a sense, Chinese on the eve of the Ming.

Nasr al-Din al-Bukhari was the governor of Yunnan in the late 1200s and was born not in Bukhara but in Yunnan itself. He was the son of Sayyid Shams al-Din Omar al-Bukhari, Yunnan's first provincial governor who was appointed to the position by Yuan Emperor Khubilai Khan. Shams al-Din was also an ancestor of Yunnanese admiral Zheng He, who was born a century later (1300s) and hired by the Ming's Hongwu and Yongle emperors. Shams al-Din, the Central Asian born father of Nasr al-Din, was known by two names: Shams al-Din in Arabic and Persian, and the Sinicized version of the same name that today would sound like *Zhānsīdīng* in modern Mandarin.⁵ The reason Shams al-Din and other Central Asian administrators ended up working in Yuan service was because the Mongol Ilkhanids of present-day Iran and Uzbekistan maintained diplomatic and commercial relations with the Mongol Yuan of China. Muslims who originally worked in Ilkhanid service often moved to the Yuan administration. In Shams al-Din's case, his career east of Bukhara took him first to Beijing and then to Yunnan. In Yunnan, he was tasked with building Confucian, Buddhist, and Islamic sacred spaces in what had the intended effect of urbanizing and Sinicizing China's then-frontier and rural regions.

From the perspective of later Ming history, the rise of Yuan-era Yunnanese Muslim political figures of Central Asian ancestry simultaneously echoed the role of Pu Shougeng in Song-era Quanzhou and foreshadowed the career of admiral Zheng He. It also foreshadowed the Ming-era career of a certain Mawlana Yusuf, a polyglot court interpreter in the Ming palace in Beijing whom the Central Asian traveler Ghayath al-Din Naqqash encountered as part of the fifteenth-century embassy from Timurid Samarkand to the Ming capital. Naqqash's story appears in the next chapter. What the Ming-era careers of Zheng He and Mawlana Yusuf indicate is that despite the massive shifts in governance that occurred with the Ming's expulsion of Mongol ruling circles in the late 1300s, Beijing's pattern of employing commonly multilingual Muslims as administrative go-betweens connecting China with Central Asia became a permanent part of Ming diplomacy.

Muslim sources on the eve of the Ming era tells us that the example of the Bukharis in China was far from rare. Rashid al-Din al-Hamadani, a physician employed by the neighboring Mongol Ilkhanid Empire further west, was a witness to this phenomenon. One of his most widely read texts, *Compendium of Chronicles*, offers evidence of a widespread Muslim administrative presence in both inland cities like Zhejiang and coastal cities like Guangdong.⁶ Their Persian names indicate origins not only in Bukhara, but also other Central Asian centers like Khwarezm and Khorasan. The pattern of hiring Muslims in Beijing became so embedded in the later Ming era that the most prominent Jesuit scientist during the Age of Exploration, Matteo Ricci, described how Beijing's bureau of astronomy employed many Muslims. That fact must have come as a surprise given his encounter with Muslims in South and Southeast Asia during his trip along the Portuguese trade routes to Macau.

Ming-era Beijing, in other words, was not only situated at the eastern crossroads of the silk and spice routes, but it also embraced its cultural links with those routes. This connection helps contextualize why, in the lead-up to the Age of Exploration, Chinese commodities like porcelain and silk loomed large in the eyes of Iberian monarchs and mariners. Trade along the silk and spice routes was more active than ever in the late 1400s, which meant that cities like Venice, Cairo, and Istanbul were replete with the objects that would come to dominate the portfolio of Portuguese, Spanish, and later Dutch and British business networks. The China that the Iberians would encounter was the same China that hired Central Asian Muslim administrators: it was China under the Great Ming. What facilitated a European-Chinese encounter in Southeast Asia was the fact that the Ming had already commissioned at least one of these Yunnanese Muslim administrators, namely Zheng He, to build political and commercial relationships with the rising Muslim sultanates of Southeast Asia.

MING DIPLOMACY ACROSS SOUTHEAST ASIA'S SULTANATES

The early Ming era saw a transformation of Southeast Asian politics and society that included the rise of Islam in the region and a closer connection between the rising Muslim sultans and Beijing. The sultanates themselves emerged out of the fragmentation of several older maritime states in the region, and they included the famous sultanates of Pasai, Melaka, Banten, and Brunei. Pasai's proximity to present-day Aceh in northwest Indonesia

illustrates the region's geographic connections with the Middle East and the Indian Ocean coast. Brunei's proximity to the Philippines, like Melaka's distance from Thailand and Yunnan, points to the sultanates' proximity to China. Banten's location, close to present-day Jakarta, highlights the region's connection with the most strategically important center of Southeast Asia in the eyes of the Ming in the late 1300s and the European navigators of the 1400s: the Spice Islands. Southeast Asia was strategically important to the Ming because of Indonesia's Molucca Islands (Spice Islands) and the region's location at the crossroads of the Indian Ocean and South China Sea—that is, the intersection of commercial traffic coming to China both from the Middle East and from Japan and Korea.

Given Southeast Asia's geographical connections with the Middle East and Indian Ocean coast, it was fitting that the Ming commissioned a Yunnanese Muslim admiral for diplomatic expeditions in the region in the early 1400s. When Zheng He embarked on his voyages, he was accompanied by a Muslim crewmate named Ma Huan. Unlike Zheng He, Ma Huan was a convert to Islam and came not from Yunnan but coastal China. Ma Huan's surviving written observations of Southeast Asia note the presence of Muslims among both Chinese and non-Chinese communities throughout Southeast Asia, including Java. Ma Huan's descriptions of these Chinese Muslim communities in Southeast Asia correlate accurately with historical evidence of the settlement of Chinese Muslims in the Malay Peninsula during the transition from the Yuan to the Ming periods in the mid-1300s. The rise of Islam among Southeast Asian ruling circles, in other words, may have been linked with a broader cultural expansion of coastal China in the 1300s into the worlds of Southeast Asia. Zheng He and Ma Huan's connections with the Ming, with Chinese Islam, and with the Southeast Asian sultanates was likely the tip of the iceberg in this story of Ming China's cultural expansion into the islands of the Malay Archipelago.

What epitomized these connections most was the expeditions' most memorable outcome: the absorption of the Sultanate of Melaka into a kind of patron-client relationship with Beijing that ultimately protected it in the 1400s from invasion by Thailand's Ayutthaya Kingdom. For the Melakan sultanate, a tributary relationship with Ming China offered foreign powers access to precious Chinese commodities like porcelain wares, silk and brocade textiles, calendars, and copper coins.⁷ For the Ming, close relations with the Melakan sultanate offered strategic access to the Spice Islands and

Indian Ocean commerce some one hundred years before Iberian mariners established regular shipping routes through the region.

What distinguished the Ming from these later Iberian mariners was, among other distinctions, the scale of the maritime operation and the projection of power it intended. This scale, together with the overall projection of Ming power under the leadership of multiple Chinese Muslim mariners, likely facilitated the growth of Islam's cultural currency within Southeast Asia's increasingly Muslim ruling circles at a time when Muslims from lands further west were already traveling in the region as merchants. Zheng He's fleet was vast, and its memory loomed large enough in Southeast Asian history that it became embedded in a variety of oral traditions. While the exact size of these boats continues to be debated, the scale and sight of the fleet would have been impressive even in modern ports. In contrast with Columbus's three comparatively tiny unaccompanied vessels, Zheng He's fleet led with 62 large treasure ships together with a larger entourage of 225 smaller boats. The highest estimates of the leading boats' length are as high as 400 feet, though they were likely not that long.⁸ Still, by comparison, large high-walled Portuguese carracks reached up to 150 feet in length, while Venetian galleys with low walls were slightly longer at 160 feet. The Santa Maria, one of the vessels that carried Christopher Columbus's crew, was just short of 72 feet. The contrast in size offers perspective on what a remarkable sight Chinese ships arriving on tributary missions must have been. The fleet also visited an impressive number of lands during their first four voyages between 1405 and 1421: Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, India, Iran, Somalia, Kenya, Yemen, and Oman. The variety of ports that Zheng He and Ma Huan visited indicates that the connection between Ming China and the rising Muslim sultanates of Southeast Asia were just one part of a larger diplomatic campaign to connect Beijing with the many ruling circles of the South China Sea and Indian Ocean. The lasting transformation of Vietnam into a center of Chinese political and intellectual culture is perhaps the clearest artifact of Ming history that illustrates best how zealously the Ming turned towards the South China Sea.

The Limits of China's Southeastern Turn during the Ming: Vietnam and Thailand

The Ming's connections with Vietnam and Thailand, located between China and the Southeast Asian sultanates, represented both the limits and possibilities of the Ming's Southeast Asian turn. On the one hand, Vietnam

and Thailand's proximity to southern China meant the Ming would pursue a more aggressive military approach in the region. On the other hand, these were powerful states that would attempt to outmaneuver not only China but also all of the later European arrivals interested in Thai and Vietnamese ports.

More specifically, the same Ming Yongle Emperor (r. 1402–1424) who commissioned Zheng He's travels to Melaka and Mecca also invaded Annam in present-day Vietnam in 1406. The invasion ushered in several decades of Ming domination in the region. The Vietnamese state's conquest of its chief rival Cham in 1471 was facilitated by the fifty-year process of Vietnamese political and military centralization that took place partly in response to Ming presence in the region.⁹ By the late fifteenth century, Vietnam had taken over most of Cham, and its administrators managed to placate the Ming emperors by subsuming Vietnam into a tributary relationship with the Ming. One of the most remarkable outcomes of this Ming-Vietnamese connection was the Vietnamese state's assimilation of Confucian political ethics, a phenomenon more common in Northeast Asia. That expansion of Ming-era Confucianism into Vietnam paralleled in many ways the movement of Chinese Muslims to Southeast Asia in the same period.

In contrast with the Ming's abilities in Vietnam were its limits in Thailand. The Ayutthaya Kingdom based in the region developed a complex connection with the Ming that more closely resembled Beijing's patron-client relationship with Melaka. Thailand had an old patron-client relationship with China dating back to the Mongol era and was held back by the Ming from encroaching on the Melakan sultanate by the promise of continued Chinese-Thai relations and the threat of a Chinese invasion similar to the Vietnam example. Annual tribute missions that filled Beijing's coffers remained lucrative. For its part, Thailand's independence throughout the Ming era and into the arrival of European powers in the 1500s meant that its ports could grow into a global center of commerce that rivaled Melaka with a similar mix of merchants coming from the Middle East, the Indian Ocean coasts, China, and Japan.¹⁰

In projecting Ming power to the closest and most distant reaches of Southeast Asia, in sum, Ming diplomacy accomplished what its administrators sought to achieve: the transformation of Southeast Asia into China's commercial and political backyard. The Ming annals recount the arrival of delegations in Beijing that include the Melakan sultan himself, while

Malay epics offer multiple accounts of Chinese political figures settling in the region and producing local dynasties.¹¹ It was this set of connections that made China loom so large in the eyes of Portuguese mariners arriving in the Malay peninsula in the 1500s, and it was a similar set of connections that the Ming cultivated in their third frontier—Northeast Asia—that made Japan the most climactic site of Europe’s encounters with the Chinese commercial world across the centuries between the Age of Exploration and Commodore Perry’s arrival in Tokyo Bay.

THE MING IN GORYEO KOREA AND MUROMACHI JAPAN

Every dimension of the Ming’s diplomatic connections with Japan and Korea in the late 1300s pointed to how culturally intertwined cities like Beijing, Seoul, and Tokyo would remain as late as the 1900s during Japan’s turn away from China. The legacy of Ming political and intellectual culture, from Confucian social and political ethics to Chan (Zen) Buddhist sacred traditions, looms large even in present-day Korea and Japan. In both countries, sociopolitical reform movements continue their industrial-era debates about the limitations of a once ubiquitous Chinese cultural past in the same way Southeast Asian nations look simultaneously to China and the West as they reinterpret their histories and navigate the world’s geopolitical landscape. For the Europeans who arrived in the region during the Age of Exploration, China loomed large in Japan, which meant that diplomatic engagement with both powers went hand in hand. What made Beijing’s presence particularly strong in the region was the set of diplomatic overtures that built on a much older history of close connections across Northeast Asia.

When the new Ming Emperor Chu Yuanchang (Zhu Yuanzhang) took the throne in Beijing in 1368, he styled his regnal period the Hongwu (洪武, “Great Martial Power”) era. The name he gave his regnal period made him the Hongwu Emperor (r. 1368–1398). This conception of history and time in terms of Chinese ruling periods was shared across Northeast Asia, where the “Middle Kingdom” represented the center of politics and culture well into the 1800s. The Ming made sure to maintain this connection with neighbors like Japan through several diplomatic missions that were contemporary with the actual relocation of Chinese administrators and intellectuals to Japan.

After his ascension, the Hongwu Emperor sent an edict to Northeast Asian states establishing his claim to the throne of the Middle Kingdom (Zhongguo)—that is, China. “We are the ruler of the Middle Kingdom,”

it read. “When the dynastic fortune of the Song reached an end, Heaven commanded the immortal [*chen-jen*, referring to Khubilai Khaghan] in the desert to enter the Middle Kingdom and become the lord of the empire.”¹² The edict explained how this divinely ordained dynastic rule passed from son to grandson for more than a hundred years, but that as the Mongol Yuan’s dynastic fortunes diminished, local strongmen vied with local magnates until the Ming family restored order. “The title of the empire has been set as Great Ming,” it declared. “The present year has been made the first year of Hongwu.”¹³

Since the new Ming dynasty controlled key coastal ports once held by the Yuan and Song, Northeast and Southeast Asian states cultivated diplomatic relations with the Ming in response to the edicts. In the Korean peninsula, the Goryeo dynasty was nearing the final decades of its rule and delayed its recognition of the new Ming dynasty for almost ten years.¹⁴ The survival of the Goryeo dynasty was at least partly based on its role as a client state of the Mongol Yuan, with whom the Goryeo political elite intermarried. The result was that for almost a decade after the rise of the Ming, the Goryeo dynasty precariously managed to engage in diplomatic relations with the Ming while continuing to recognize the Yuan as the imperial sovereigns of China. Evidence of this two-sided diplomatic strategy appears in the Goryeo’s surviving official communications, which indicate the year of the letters in terms of the year of the exiled Yuan khan’s reigning period rather than the period of the Hongwu Emperor. As mentioned, the name Hongwu identified the period of the first Ming emperor’s reign rather than the emperor himself, making 1368 the first year of the Hongwu period and Chu Yuanchang the Hongwu Emperor. More than dynastic minutiae, the correct identification of China’s reigning period in Korean and Japanese communications was a key part of the renewal of regional diplomatic relations from one Chinese period to another. The Ming expected Korean diplomatic communications in 1374 to be dated as the sixth year of the Hongwu, but they were instead dated with the respective year of the Yuan ruler. Between 1374 and 1377, more than ten years after the rise of the Ming, Korea attempted to hedge its relations with both the Ming and the Yuan by continuing to recognize the Yuan ruler as “Son of Heaven” in communications with the Ming, even as “Son of Heaven” was the imperial title the Hongwu Emperor claimed to inherit once the Ming captured Nanjing and Beijing.

The outcome was a diplomatic disaster for the Goryeo and illustrated at least one of the many ways China played a dominant role in Northeast Asian

politics and culture well into the late 1800s: in a move likely intended to coerce the Goryeo into realigning themselves away from the Yuan, multiple Korean emissaries were imprisoned by the end of their stay in Nanjing. By 1377, the Goryeo officially recognized Ming suzerainty.¹⁵ With the formal recognition of Ming power, the Goryeo sought Ming investiture of authority throughout the early 1380s in order to bolster the legitimacy of the dynasty. By 1392, however, a Goryeo general usurped the throne and established a new dynasty that would survive until nearly World War I: the Joseon, which oversaw a major intellectual and cultural turn towards the Ming.

In accordance with Ming intellectual developments, Korea's Joseon dynasty (1392–1897) were patrons of Neo-Confucian political and social ethics. During much of China's Ming period (1368–1644), the Joseon facilitated a pattern of cultural convergence that cultivated syncretic forms of Sino-Korean arts and literature.¹⁶ Among the early Joseon's most enduring legacies was its cultivation of a dedicated non-Chinese phonetic script—namely, the phonetic Hangul script—that was used together with Chinese ideograms (Chinese: 漢字, *hànzì*, Korean: *hanja*, Japanese: *kanji*) in the formation of an early modern Sino-Korean literary corpus.¹⁷

Further east from Goryeo Korea, Muromachi (Ashikaga) Japan was in a complex position of simultaneously attempting to establish diplomatic and trade relations with the Ming while also limiting Chinese involvement in Japanese political affairs. An initial period of diplomatic relations was cut short in 1380, when the Ming Emperor suspected that the Japanese were colluding with fallen Ming minister Hu Weiyong (d. 1380) to usurp the throne.¹⁸ Under the third Muromachi shogun, Yoshimitsu (1358–1408), diplomatic and trade relations were restored. Yoshimitsu's reign saw the growth of lucrative tributary commerce with China. Tributary trade, in contrast with private trade, involved China's reception and housing of a foreign embassy that brought in valuable foreign commodities in an official capacity. In return, the embassy left with precious Chinese commodities like silk, porcelain, and tea.

For Joseon Korea and Muromachi Japan, China's tributary commerce amounted to lucrative import trade of luxury commodities that left a strong impact on local material culture and taste, from local porcelain and pseudo-porcelain production to the cultivation and consumption of Chinese tea. In exchange, Chinese tributary embassies brought back Japanese commodities such as silver and Japanese silk. The Portuguese and Dutch would eventually participate in this inter-Asian trade, bringing Chinese silk to Japan in

exchange for Japanese silver. For the Ming, this tributary exchange had clear and measurable political outcomes.

Beyond projecting Ming power abroad and bolstering the dynasty's legitimacy in the region, this tributary commerce facilitated several specific diplomatic goals related to borders and security. Most importantly, Muromachi (Ashikaga) Japan's administration agreed to cooperate with the Chinese on limiting piracy along the Chinese coast. By 1403, the shogun Yoshimitsu sent an embassy that attempted to ingratiate the shogunate to the Ming by declaring Japan a vassal or client of China, identifying the shogun as "Your subject, the King of Japan."¹⁹ As in the case of late Goryeo Korea, there were lucrative outcomes: the Ming soon reestablished trade relations, reopening the maritime trade intendancies in Ningpo, Quanzhou, and Canton to Japanese traders in accordance with a system of certifications—the so-called tally (Chinese: 勘合, *kānhé*, Japanese: *kango*) system—that ensured that merchants were Japanese-sponsored tribute missions and not smugglers or pirates.²⁰ For the Ming, the key outcome of stable trade relations with Japan was the commitment of the shogun to preventing smuggling off of China's coast. Under Yoshimitsu, Zen monks played a major role as go-betweens facilitating these diplomatic agreements. Under his successor Yoshimochi, in a move that foreshadowed some of the late Tokugawa debates about Japan's Sinocentrism, the shogun distanced both Japan from the Ming and the shogunate from the Chan (Zen) monks involved in Chinese-Japanese political relations. Despite these intermittent tensions, private trade with China continued through Japan's southern ports in what reflects an enduring commercial connection with Ming China throughout the Muromachi and early Tokugawa periods.

Chinese Intellectual Culture in Joseon Korea and Muromachi Japan

Against this backdrop of Ming diplomatic exchange, what solidified an enduring Chinese cultural impact on modern Korea and Japan was the transfer of specifically Ming-era Confucian ethical philosophy—that is, Ming-era Neo-Confucian sociopolitical ethics—into Korean and Japanese political circles. In the case of Korea, the Joseon dynasty's cultivation of Confucianism correlated with the Ming's own patronage of Confucian political and social ethics. Confucian scholars in Joseon Korea played a role in the Korean administration as advisers, diplomats, and, more broadly, scholar-officials. Joseon founder King Yi Seonggae (Taejo) came to power with the assistance of Jeong Dojeon (d. 1398), a Korean Confucian scholar

who helped establish key institutions of governance. Jeong Dojeon was a graduate of the *Seonggyun-gwan*, the highest institution of learning during the Goryeo and Joseon periods dedicated to Neo-Confucian scholar-officials working in Korean civil service. A key figure in the reform of Korean law and political ethics along Neo-Confucian lines, Jeong Dojeon wrote several seminal Neo-Confucian works in the early Joseon period that included *Joseon Kyeonguk Cheon* (*Joseon's Codes for Governing the Country*) and *Kyeongje Mungam* (*Historical Mirror for Managing the World and Saving the People*) that played a role in disseminating the Confucian social ethics characteristic of Joseon Korea well into the twentieth century.²¹

Ming-era Chinese political and intellectual culture became similarly embedded in Japan in the late 1300s and 1400s, giving rise to Japan's mix of Zen Buddhism and Japanese Confucianism in both ruling circles and popular society. Chan (Zen) Buddhist monks close to Japanese political circles cultivated close connections between the two states and facilitated a similar transfer of political culture eastward. Chan (Zen) monks had the strongest knowledge of Chinese language and high culture, which made them appropriate go-betweens in Chinese-Japanese diplomacy.²² Yoshimitsu's (r. 1368–1394) and his successor Yoshimochi's (r. 1394–1423) respective turns towards and away from close diplomatic relations with Ming China correlated with their respective proximity and distance from Japanese Chan (Zen) monks who played a role as advisers to the shogunal governing authorities (*bakufu*).

In a similar parallel with Ming-Joseon relations, Japanese Neo-Confucian scholar-officials would also eventually play a role in Ming-Japanese diplomacy, but this development occurred in the late Ming period with the transition of Japan from the Muromachi period to the Tokugawa period.²³ In seventeenth-century Edo (Tokyo), the new capital of the Tokugawa shogunate, earlier Kamakura-era and Muromachi-era Neo-Confucianism in Japan moved from the realm of Zen monasteries to the wider political and social world of Japan, including the official academic education of the bakufu's administrators.

Tokugawa-era Neo-Confucian administrators like Arai Hakuseki, a leading mediator of Japan's reception of Chinese political and ethical thought in the early 1700s, was a product of that late Ming-era Japanese naturalization of Neo-Confucianism in Japanese politics and society. Hakuseki was most famous for his interest in Dutch medicine, and his later successor Sugita Genpaku in the 1800s witnessed the proliferation of Dutch learning

throughout Japan in the lead-up to its turn away from China and emulation of British industrialization. In the Sinocentric world of Northeast Asia where they lived, however, neither Hakuseki nor Genpaku could predict that the Dutch learning they cultivated would radically contest Chinese cultural currency by the end of the Edo era. It was a contest of cultures in the 1800s with an outcome that overturned the primacy of China dating back to the Ming's zealous diplomatic efforts to center China in the politics and cultures of Asia. In the five centuries since the start of the European Age of Exploration, European military technology had advanced to such a degree that it induced a sense of urgency among late Qing-era and Edo-era Chinese and Japanese reformers shocked by the European transition from mostly careful diplomacy in the 1400s to the diplomacy of gunboat coercion in their dealings with Northeast Asian powers in the 1800s. The once mighty Ming-era Chinese naval force that was powerful enough to dictate Dutch settlement patterns around seventeenth-century Taiwan was, in the late Qing era, scrambling to contain British plans in Chinese ports following the nineteenth-century Opium Wars. By the end of the century, both Qing-era and Edo-era Chinese and Japanese reformers planned ways of reorganizing their respective lands along European political, intellectual, and social models. The degree that Chinese cultural currency was contested in Northeast Asia was unprecedented and even surprising against the backdrop of a half millennium of Chinese cultural transfer westward to Europe. That turn bookmarked the end of a half millennium of China's role in shaping the modern world, but in the words of early twentieth-century Chinese administrators themselves, the eclipse of China was not the end of the Middle Kingdom, and like the industrialized Japanese Empire, an industrialized China was on the horizon.

What follows in the next chapters is a closer look at the stories and accounts of the people who traveled to China and its frontiers following the rise of the Ming and the transition to the Qing (1644–1912), and how they became conduits of Chinese cultural transfer around the world. From Samarkand and Melaka to Macau and Manila, all of the cities where Asian and European merchants set out to engage with China through commerce and diplomacy became transit points for the transfer of objects and images from China to the rest of the modern world.



FIGURE 1.1. The trade agreements that developed between Beijing and the West in the 1970s evoked those of the late 1800s, but the role of manufacturing exporter had been reversed. Back in the 1800s, the conclusion of the Opium Wars and the ratification of the Treaty of Nanking saw China become an importer of a variety of machine-made Western goods that were manufactured in the United States and the United Kingdom, especially textiles. The Treaty of Nanking also saw the establishment of British and American extraterritorial enclaves in Shanghai—that is, the Shanghai International Settlement (1863–1941) complete with Western tribunals. Thirty years after the enclave was officially closed, three successive US presidents—namely, Presidents Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, and Jimmy Carter—laid the groundwork for a new era of political and economic relations with China. In this new era, China would become a new high-tech industrial manufacturer for Western import markets. This newer period of relations was developed through a series of diplomatic meetings with Chinese head of state Deng Xiaoping (center). Secretary of State Henry Kissinger (1973–1977), previously National Security Advisor (1969–1975), was one of the key architects of both the policy move and these meetings. Gerald Ford (left) and First Lady Betty Ford (right) traveled to Beijing in 1978 for a state visit, while British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher visited in 1979. In the case of both the United States and the United Kingdom, one of the outcomes of these meetings was the controversial acceleration of Western deindustrialization and offshore labor outsourcing in accordance with economic theories in favor of globalization and an expanded services sector. Forty years later, as China has emerged as the world's foremost manufacturing power, the policies of that era have become the subject of heated debate among policymakers and economists alike. On the one hand, China's role is not unprecedented, as it evokes the days of Ming and Qing preindustrial manufacturing in the 1500s and 1600s. In those days, Western business networks imported Chinese textiles, tea, ceramics, and scent before learning to manufacture similar items themselves by machine in newly industrialized Europe. On the other hand, China's role is unprecedented in at least one key way: China's current iteration of manufacturing know-how, and specifically its high-tech machinery and growing use of robotics, has its origins in the intellectual transfer eastward that occurred in the 1970s and 1980s. A middle player that facilitated China's current rise was Japan, with its much older and longer history of industrialization dating back to the modern Japanese Empire.

Source: Gerald R. Ford Library/Wikimedia Commons. Public domain. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gerald_and_Betty_Ford_meet_with_Deng_Xiaoping,_1975_A7598-20A.jpg

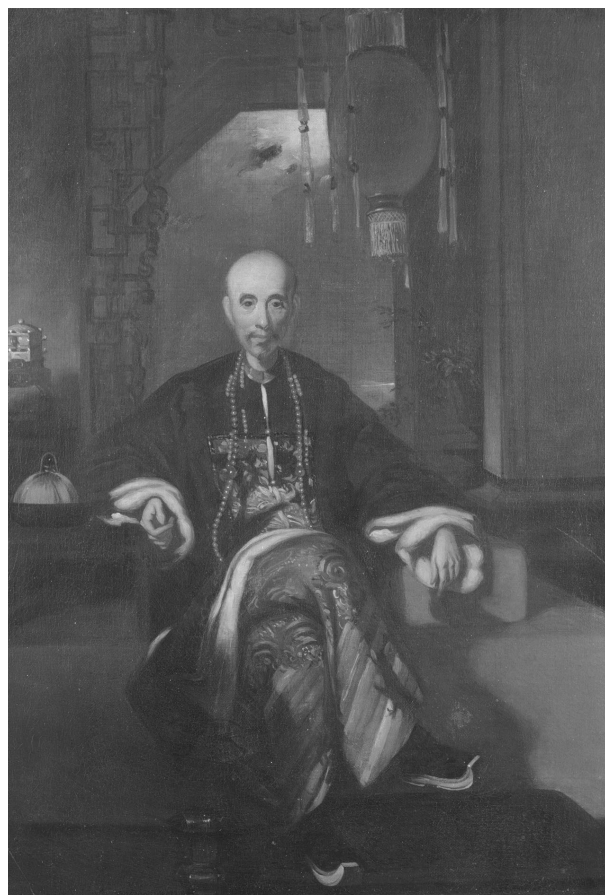


FIGURE 1.2. In the early 1800s, Chinese merchants like Wu Bingjian (English: Howqua) amassed an extraordinary amount of wealth in the import-export world of Guangzhou. The so-called Canton System restricted official import-export exchange with Western countries to the port of Guangzhou, where a Chinese *hong* was assigned to each of thirteen warehouses to facilitate trade. Wu Bingjian was the most powerful among them in the decades connecting the two Opium Wars. Restrictions on trade with the West were significantly loosened in the aftermath of the Second Opium War, when whole districts of Chinese coastal cities came under international control. The Treaty of Nanking, ratified in the aftermath of the Opium Wars, gave the British and other Western powers extraterritorial settlement and legal privileges in port cities like Shanghai. The seaside district known as the Bund, for example, once included a quarter for Westerners that was established in 1845 and that remained in place in different forms as late as 1941. Western control over this quarter came to an abrupt end at the height of the Japanese Empire's conflict with the United States during World War II and in the final years of the Chinese civil war. Shanghai's more recent connections with Western residents is connected with the rise of modern Shanghai since the 1970s as a center of Chinese technology, telecommunications, and manufacturing.

Source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Public domain. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/10478>



FIGURE 1.3. Since the transformation of its economy in the 1970s and the establishment of trade partnerships with the Americas and the European Union, China has emerged as the leading manufacturer of exports like electric vehicles. Bogotá, Colombia (above), is the world's largest importer of electric vehicles that are used for public transit. The same company that makes these vehicles, BYD, also produces mass transit vehicles in industrialized cities like Stockholm. Neighboring Southeast Asia has likewise become a global exporter of electronics since the 1970s and, like China, is the center of innovation in industries like biotechnology and renewable energy. Since the 2000s, these industries have begun to catch up with their counterparts in Japan and the West, leaving some entrepreneurs in the United States looking eastward for cues in innovation. Taken together, the rise of China, the so-called Four Asian Tigers (Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong), and the "tiger cub" economies (Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam) have renewed popular interest in understanding the global economy from an Asia-centered perspective. From the perspective of global history, Western trade and security agreements with the ASEAN members states in many ways evoke an earlier era of European negotiations with the kingdoms and sultanates of Southeast Asia during the heyday of the Age of Exploration.

Source: BYD Colombia/Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Autobuses_el%C3%A9ctricos_BYD_en_Bogot%C3%A1.jpg. Creative Commons (CC BY-SA 2.5)

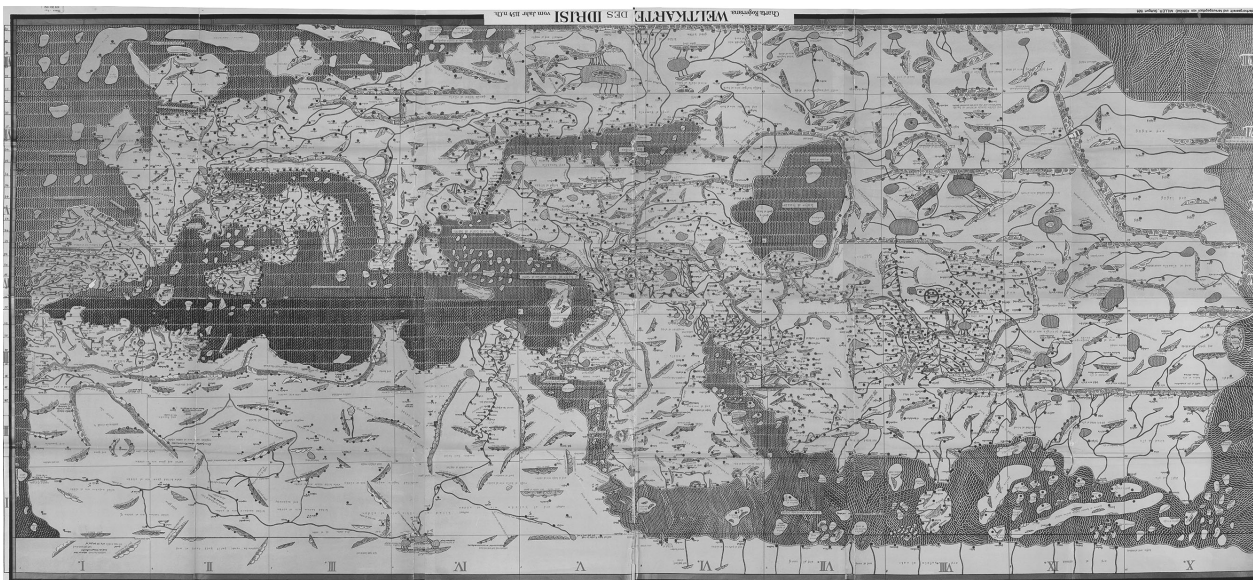


FIGURE 2.1. The world, as European and Chinese cartographers knew it in the 1400s, was still imagined the way Middle Eastern cartographers had mapped it back in the 1100s: the eastern Atlantic coast, the Mediterranean Sea, and the Indian Ocean were the dominant maritime regions, making trade with China possible only via the overland silk routes and the maritime spice routes. In the lead-up to the Age of Exploration, few European merchants traveled directly to China, and those who did went overland through

Central Asia. Venetian merchant Marco Polo traveled along the overland silk routes to Dadu (present-day Beijing), where he met Mongol Emperor Khubilai Khan in 1269. A representation of his trip appears in Majorcan cartographer Abraham Cresque's *Atlas català* (Catalan Atlas, 1375). There was a third route westward across the Atlantic, but it remained uncharted. The fact that the oceans furthest west and east were distinct—that is, the Atlantic and Pacific—likewise remained unknown, at least outside the Mesoamerican empires. The most advanced map of the twelfth century (above), Muhammad al-Idrisi's originally south-facing (flipped) *Tabula Rogeriana* (Map of Roger) of 1154 (above), became the basis of European maps used as late as the 1450s on the eve of the Age of Exploration. Venetian monk Fra Mauro's map was similar, but it attempted to represent visually the world's spherical dimensions in what amounted to a two-dimensional globe. Chinese, Korean, and Japanese maps were similarly based on Middle Eastern cartography, but they used much larger dimensions to represent China and the Indian Ocean. Although Middle Eastern merchants had extensive travel experience throughout Southeast Asia and the Chinese coast during the Tang era (ca. 618–907) and Song era (960–1279), Arabic-language cartography was still more accurate in its representation of the Mediterranean coastline than of the Indian Ocean and South China Sea. Later maps of the Age of Exploration represent Southeast Asia and the East Asian coastlines with much greater accuracy in accordance with the Jesuit-led synthesis that developed between European cartography and Chinese land surveys. Those Chinese surveys drew in part on some of the observations made by Yunnanese admiral Zheng He and his crewmate Ma Huan, Muslim mariners in Ming service, during their diplomatic expeditions in the 1400s across the ports of Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean, East Africa, and the Middle East.

Source: Wikimedia Commons. Public domain. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tabula_Rogeriana

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FIGURE 2.2. Muslim Yunnanese admiral Zheng He's expeditions saw the expansion of Ming-era diplomacy and commerce throughout the South China Sea, Indian Ocean, and the Arabian Sea. Southeast Asia, especially in the island of Java, saw a growth in families with Chinese patriarchs and Javanese matriarchs. These families came to be known by a variety of terms including, most recently, Peranakan, Baba-Nyonya, and Kiau-Seng. While most present-day Peranakan families are not Muslim, historical evidence indicates that many of the earliest families were Muslim and were absorbed into the expanding Chinese-influenced Muslim cultures of early modern Southeast Asia. This photograph captures the wedding scene of a couple from Penang: Chung Guat Hooi (left), the daughter of Kapitan Chung Thye Phin, and Khoo Soo Beow (right), the son of Khoo Heng Pan.

Sources: Lukacs/Wikimedia Commons. Public domain. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peranakans>



FIGURE 2.3. Korea's Joseon dynasty (1392–1910), which succeeded the Goryeo, rose to power in the early Ming era and remained in place well into the 1900s. Like Japan's Tokugawa shoguns, the Joseon cultivated a close political and cultural connection with the Ming, absorbing China's Neo-Confucian political and social ethics as well its Chan (Japanese: Zen, Korean: Seon) Buddhism. King Yi Seonggae (Taejo), pictured above, came to power with the assistance of a Korean Confucian scholar who helped establish Korea's early modern institutions of governance. The scholar, named Jeong Dojeon (d. 1398), was a graduate of the Seonggyun-gwan, the highest institution of learning dedicated to Neo-Confucian scholar-officials working in Korean civil service. A key figure in the reform of Korean law and political ethics along Neo-Confucian lines, Jeong Dojeon wrote several seminal Neo-Confucian works in the early Joseon period that included *Joseon Kyeonguk Cheon* (Joseon's Codes for Governing the Country) and *Kyeongje Mungam* (Historical Mirror for Managing the World and Saving the People). These works, which were characteristic of Ming-Joseon relations, played a key role in popularizing the Confucian social ethics characteristic of Joseon Korea well into the twentieth century. In a notable sign of the older Mongol Yuan-era legacy of culture in the region, there were Muslims living in Korea at the time of King Taejo, while the Joseon's mapmaking tradition similarly drew on China's Sino-Islamic cartographical heritage. Today, after Korea's industrialization and the turn from Buddhist and Confucian traditions to Protestantism, the legacy of Confucianism looms large in debates about social reform.

Sources: Wikimedia Commons. Public domain. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:King_Taejo_Yi_02.jpg

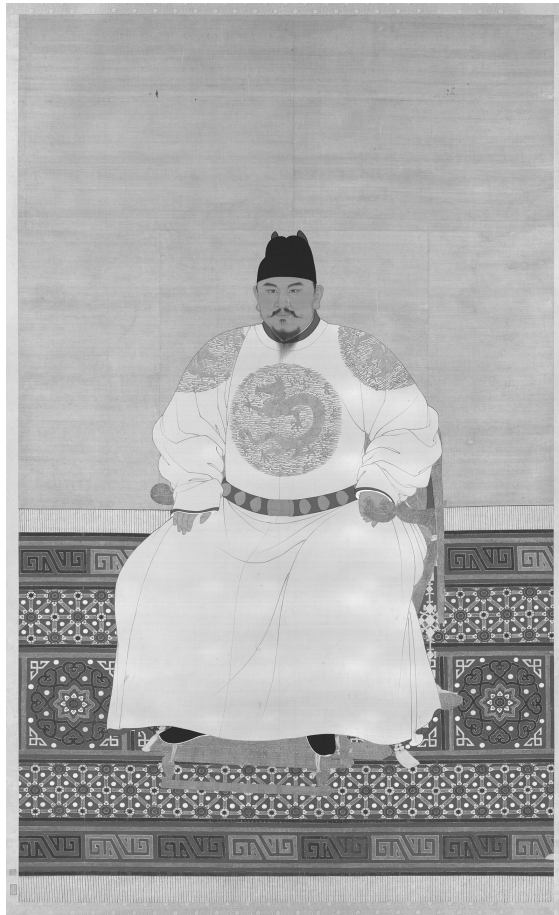


FIGURE 3.1. The Hongwu Emperor (above) was the founding emperor of the Ming and played a key role in maintaining Beijing's connections with Central Asian and Middle Eastern states in the aftermath of the Mongols' political decline. He was also responsible for cultivating the career of Yunnanese Muslim admiral Zheng He in the 1400s.

Together with his crewmate Ma Huan, also Muslim, Zheng He's expeditions to the sultanates of Southeast Asia took shape during the era of the Yongle Emperor, who received embassies from the Timurid khanate beyond the Great Wall. Central Asian traveler Ghayath al-Din Naqqash met the Yongle Emperor in Beijing's imperial district—the Forbidden City—during the Timurids' diplomatic exchange with the Ming. His observations of golden yellow silks and tapestries correspond with surviving representations of Ming emperors (above) and empresses, including Empress Xu. Gold also dominates the surviving color palette of various thrones in the Forbidden City, which were built during the Ming era. It was this same emperor who commissioned Yunnanese Muslim admiral Zheng He's expeditions to Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean. Zheng He's legacy as a Muslim in Ming service echoed Naqqash's observation of polyglot Muslims working in diplomatic capacities at the court in Beijing. The interest of Central Asian, South, and Southeast Asian Muslim rulers in diplomatic exchange was represented in Ming-era paintings that depicted the reception of gifts in China from abroad. In one example, an illustrated Chinese manuscript represents the gift of an African giraffe from Malindi sent by the ruler of Bengal (Saif al-Din Hamzah Shah) to the Yongle Emperor. The gift was evocative of Mamluk Egypt's near contemporary gift of a giraffe to the menagerie of the Medicis in Florence. During this era, corresponding with Zheng He's travels throughout Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean, giraffes came to be identified with the ancient Chinese mythological creatures known as Qilin. The cultures of the Ming's frontiers, in other words, were shaping China as much as the reverse.

Source: National Palace Museum/Wikimedia Commons. Public domain. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:A_Seated_Portrait_of_Ming_Emperor_Taizu.jpg



FIGURE 3.2. Beijing's connections to Central Asia and Southeast Asia indicated that despite the Ming's turn to the seas, trade and diplomacy with Central Asian states was still central to Ming foreign policy. Still, Ming security concerns along the western frontiers motivated the construction of the Great Wall (above) in its present form. Almost all the wall's brick and stone in its current state dates back to the Ming era (1368–1644). Central travelers like Ali Akbar Khitayi were among the first writers to describe the Great Wall in languages like Persian, Turkish, and Arabic. Lands west of the wall became part of modern China during the Qing era. Source: Walkerssk/Pixabay. Free for public use, no attribution required. <https://pixabay.com/photos/the-chinese-wall-china-wall-in-china-2174275/>

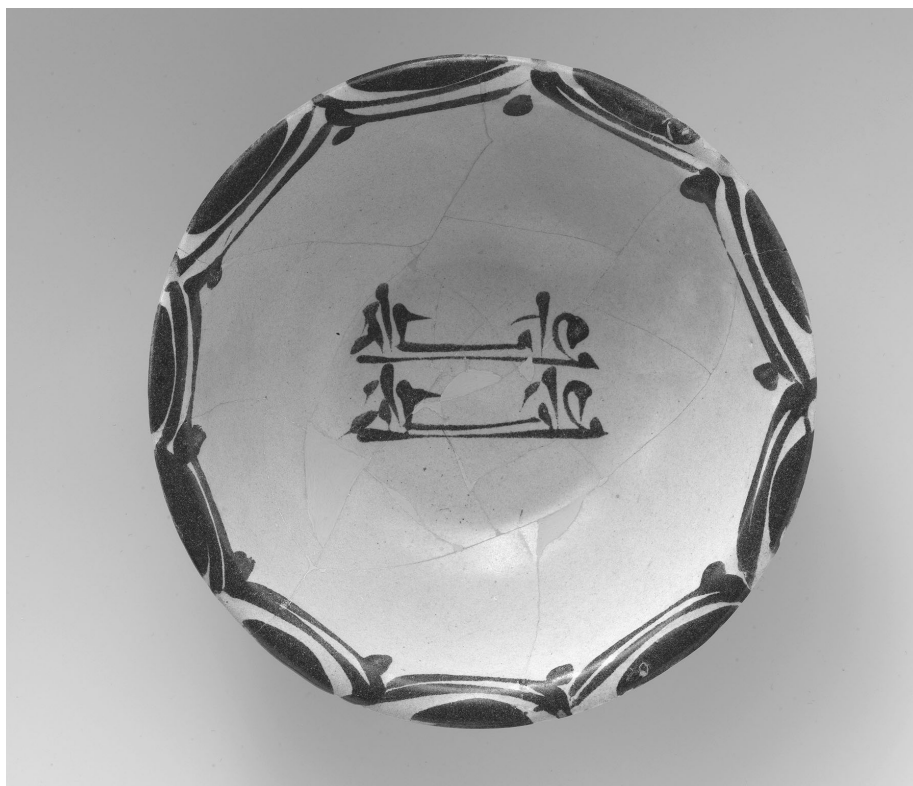


FIGURE 3.3. In the early Ming era, Central Asian Muslim travelers like Ghayath al-Din Naqqash had a deep interest in Chinese material culture, especially textiles and ceramics. The transfer westward of these objects through cities like Timurid-era Samarkand (1370–1507) had a tremendous impact on the material culture of the Ottomans after their capture of Istanbul (1453). The blue-and-white pseudo-porcelain Iznik ceramics that dominate the Blue Mosque’s design in Istanbul draw on this influence. This transfer westward of Chinese porcelain dated back to the heyday of exchange between Abbasid Baghdad (est. 761) and China during the Tang and Song eras. The use of porcelain and pseudo-porcelain in the Middle East offered an aesthetically pleasing alternative to the use of precious metals, which was widely used in palaces for ewers and other wares. As early as the ninth and tenth centuries, almost a millennium before the development of pseudo-porcelain in Delft (Netherlands), artisans in Iraq learned to emulate genuine imported Chinese porcelain using a clay-based material and tin glaze. Iraqi potters mastered the art of emulating porcelain’s luminous qualities using sophisticated firing and glazing techniques, even decorating pseudo-porcelain earthenware with minimalist ornamentation evocative of Chinese designs. The most famous example (above) dates to the ninth century, with an inscription that reads “happiness” (*ghibta*) in cobalt blue. The two-way movement of designs and ornamentation reached new heights in the Ming era, when Chinese artisans began to incorporate Arabic calligraphy into Jingdezhen-made porcelain. The most famous examples of Chinese porcelain with Arabic inscriptions date back to the reigns of the Yongle Emperor (1402–1424) and Zhengde Emperor (1502–1521) and were kept at the court in Beijing. It was during these periods when the Chinese emperors employed Muslims in the court and cultivated continued diplomatic relations across the silk and spice routes to the Middle East. One of the most famous examples has the word *purity* written in the center. Arabic inscriptions on other pieces included words like *prosperity* and *sweetness*. All Zhengde-era court pieces include the Chinese inscription “Crafted during the reign of the Zhengde Emperor of the Great Ming Dynasty.” The best preserved examples can be seen in museums like the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the National Palace Museum in Taipei.

Source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Public domain. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/451715>



FIGURE 4.1 In an illustration of Ming China's early connections with Southeast Asia's sultanates, the mausoleum of Bruneian Sultan Abdul Majid Hassan is located not in Brunei but Nanjing (above). During the Ming era, a variety of Muslim sultanates flourished in Southeast Asia in centers like Pasai (Sumatra), Melaka (Malay Peninsula), Banten (Java), Brunei (Borneo), and others. The rise of Muslim sultanates across islands of the former Srivijayan and Majapahit empires is shrouded in mystery. Southeast Asian Islam has long been seen as an outcome of cultural exchange with Muslim merchants from South Asia and the Middle East. Recent research demonstrates, however, that the oldest centers of Islam in Southeast Asia are connected with the arrival of Muslims from China. These Muslim arrivals include Muslims from the Yuan-era Chinese coast who fled the arrival of the Ming. Many Muslims still living in Ming China in the 1400s, including Zheng He and his crewmate Ma Huan, remained connected with military and administrative circles in continuity with their Yuan-era predecessors. This picture of Muslims working in Chinese imperial service in the 1300s and 1400s, together with the history of Chinese administrators and political exiles traveling to Southeast Asia, fits new evidence of Southeast Asian Islam having both Indian Ocean and Chinese origins. In accordance with this Chinese connection, it is unsurprising that the legacy of Zheng He's voyages looms large in oral histories of Islam throughout Southeast Asia. Palembang on the island of Sumatra, across the Melakan strait from the Malay peninsula and the city of Melaka, was one of the oldest centers of Islam in Southeast Asia and had an early commercial and diplomatic connection with the Ming. The city, like Melaka, is home to some of the oldest mosques in the region.

Source: Kong Xiang Chen/Dreamstime. Royalty-free, allows for unlimited print and electronic use. <https://www.dreamstime.com/stock-photo-stone-sculptures-tomb-king-boni-ad-was-refound-may-%C3%AF%C2%BC%C5%93-one-tombstone-sacred-pathe-leading-to-tomb-image97714909>

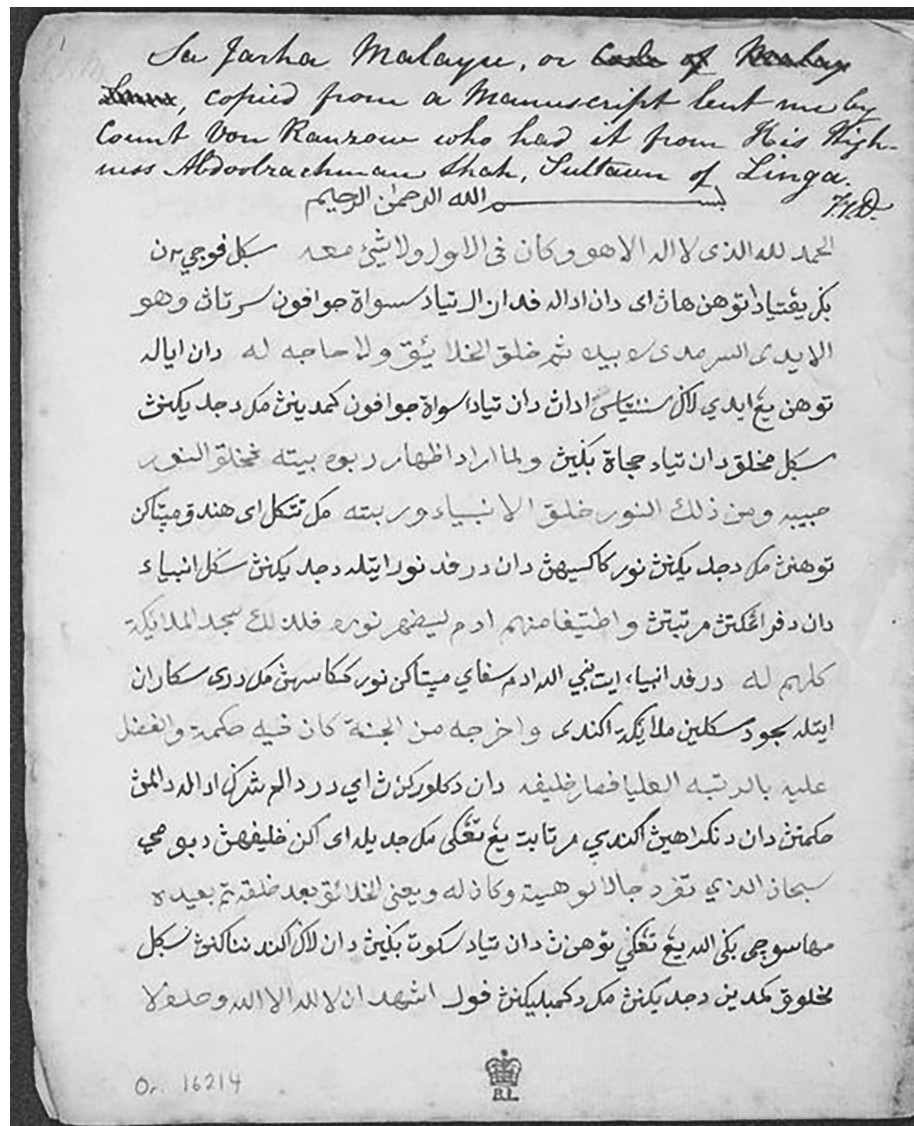


FIGURE 4.2. Like the *Undang-Undang Melaka* (above), one of the Sultanate of Melaka's early legal codes, the legend of Hang Tuah was written in Malay using a form of the Perso-Arabic script. Known as *jawi*, the script became the standard form of writing in Malay and various Southeast Asian languages by the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. *Jawi*'s use in Malay replaced the earlier Brahmic Pallava script, which is related to the Telegu-Kannada alphabet of southern and coastal India. The Perso-Arabic script continued to be widely used in texts like biographies as late as the 1800s. By the end of the 1800s, the impact of British administration introduced the use of English as a language of learning, and by the 1900s, the Latin script was used for writing Malay. Many older Malay manuscripts were brought by British administrators to London. There, collectors built libraries of originals and copies and began to study the historical contents of the texts. Some of their notes in the margins can still be seen (above).

Source: British Library, Or.16214, f.1r. Public domain. <https://blogs.bl.uk/asian-and-african/2013/11/two-malay-manuscripts-from-wales.html>



FIGURE 4.3. Like the courtly spaces of the Malay Peninsula, some of Southeast Asia's earliest mosques reflect the region's historical symbiosis of Sumatran, Javanese, and Chinese architectural and ornamentation styles. The mosque of Madura (above) features multitiered roofs and pavilions that are common architectural elements in Sumatra and Java. Its color palette features the bold yellow and gold colors common in Chinese architecture. Among the most famous mosques that feature this kind of cultural synthesis is Masjid Tengker in Melaka. Its minaret, built in the form of a pagoda, evokes the use of a pagoda in Chinese mosques from Yunnan and Ningxia to Guangzhou. The memory of past connections between Islam in Southeast Asia and Islam in China are maintained in part through objects like the Cakra Donya bell, a gift of Zheng He to the sultan of Pasai that was passed over centuries through the hands of multiple administrations: the Sultanate of Pasai, the Sultanate of Aceh, the Dutch administration, and modern Indonesia where it remains in the Aceh Museum.

Source: astama81/Pixabay. Free for commercial use, no attribution required. <https://pixabay.com/photos/masjid-architecture-mosque-madura-198176/>

CHAPTER 4

Trading with China in Malay along the Spice Routes

When the Portuguese and Spaniards first arrived in the South China Sea, the commercial worlds they encountered in centers like Melaka and Manila were already deeply intertwined with the politics, economy, and cultures of Ming China. How did the Ming manage to build these connections on the eve of the Iberians' arrival, and what motivated the Iberians to look to the South China Sea in the first place given their profitable access to Middle Eastern and Italian middlemen?

The transformation of Southeast Asia into a global hub of transoceanic commerce has its origins in a series of developments that crystallized in the 1400s. It was at the end of this century when the European Age of Exploration took shape, and it was also in this century when the Ming embarked on their own set of maritime expeditions to build diplomatic relations throughout Southeast Asia. One of the most interesting windows into the convergence of these two developments is the writings of the Malays themselves. Their representations of China, including Chinese royal figures living in the Malay peninsula, blend with an early look at the Portuguese as pirate-like characters trying to insert themselves into local commerce. The picture these texts paint of Malay-Chinese connections illustrate why Southeast Asia became so central to European interests in Chinese commodities.

This Malay representation of a global Ming China comes from a set of fifteenth-century Malay-language epics that offer colorful narrative

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